

STONE CEREMONIAL GROUNDS OF THE ABORIGINES IN THE DARLING DOWNS AREA, QUEENSLAND

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The area known as the Darling Downs, west of the Main Divide in south-eastern Queensland, consists in the main of extensive deep deposits of alluvium. There are occasional small outcrops of basalt, and at one locality of Mesozoic Sandstones, and it is somewhat surprising to find that rocks from these outcrops have been used by the Aborigines to form ceremonial grounds. In eastern Queensland, most of the tribes or groups of tribes formed their ceremonial grounds, or bora rings as they are commonly known, with soil. In general, these consist of a large circle about 80 feet in diameter with the circumference raised about two feet above the general level. At a distance of perhaps 200 or 300 yards, a second, smaller and less well-defined circle is present where initiates were prepared for ceremonies. Between the two circles there is often a pathway still well preserved.

Grounds formed with soil are not uncommon in coastal areas, east of the Main Divide and similar grounds were formed in the Darling Downs, where great depth of soil and extensive portions of country clear of high vegetation were available. Ceremonial grounds formed with rocks are known in western New South Wales and Queensland (Black, 1950, Wood Jones, 1925), and in north Queensland (McConnel, 1932), but the occurrence of a number in and near the Darling Downs is unexpected. One has already been recorded (Winterbotham, 1949), and these notes are for the purpose of recording additional examples.

We wish to express our appreciation of the advice and assistance rendered by Mr. B. G. Gilbert of Cawdor, Messrs. G. and K. Kerr of Kogan, Mr. C. Schull of Oakey, Mrs. K. Emmerson of Chinchilla and Mr. B. Ford of Miles.

CEREMONIAL GROUNDS

CAWDOR. In April, 1960, the Director of the Queensland Museum was informed by Mr. B. G. Gilbert of the presence of a stone ceremonial ground on his property. This was immediately inspected, and in June of the same year, the ground was mapped and photographed by us (Plate VIII).

Cawdor is only a few miles west of the city of Toowoomba, which is situated on the Main Divide about 85 miles west of Brisbane. The ceremonial ground is in a wide, shallow, natural amphitheatre with a gully and creek at the western extremity



Figure 1. Eastern portion of ceremonial ground at Cawdor with remnant of ring of lichen-covered basaltic rocks in foreground.



Figure 2. Portion of Kogan ceremonial ground with ring of sandstone rocks in foreground.

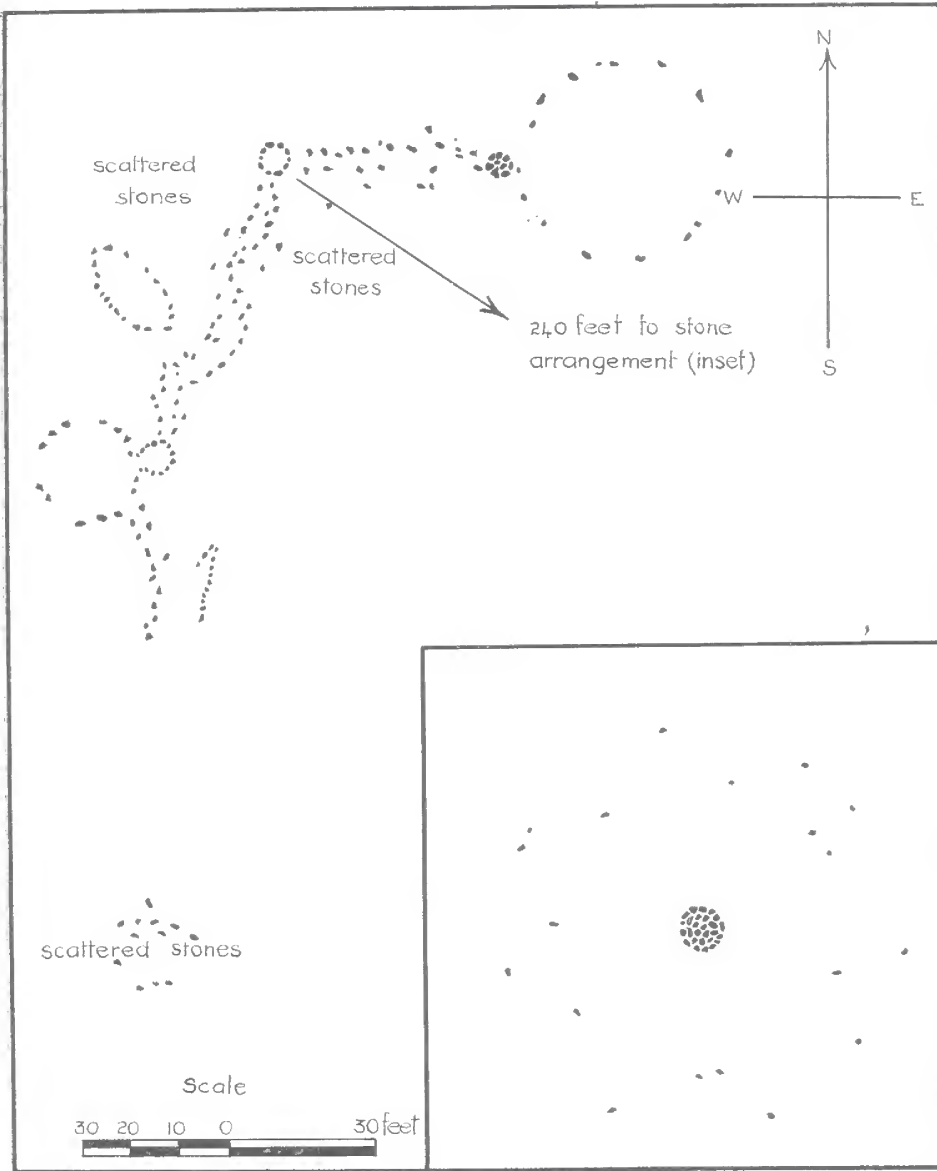


Figure 3. Plan of Kogan ceremonial ground.

and a less well-defined gully to the east, surrounded by low hills. Basalt outcrops in the centre where the soil cover is either absent or finely distributed. As a result, vegetation is absent except for a sparse cover of grasses where soil is present.

A little more than a century has passed since the first white settlement of the Darling Downs. Cultivation and grazing have subsequently been extensively practiced. Over such a period of time it is not surprising that the ceremonial ground has deteriorated, although some of the original structures remain moderately well-defined. Where a rock is in its original position, the exposed surface is generally covered with a grey-green lichen. Rocks were originally placed on the surface, and in certain areas of the ground, deposition of soil around them has resulted from the obstruction to the flow of the silt-laden waters from the surrounding hills. This process has helped to maintain the distribution of the stones, except where the run-off water has attained sufficient momentum to either partially disrupt or in some cases, destroy portions of the structures. Movements of stock have created minor alterations to the arrangement, while fencing operations have destroyed much of the northern portion.

The most conspicuous feature in the ceremonial ground is the outcrops of basalt, and in several cases these show evidence of having provided materials used in the construction. Joint surfaces are now exposed and one outcrop has been completely denuded of loose rock. Almost invariably, the largest rocks used in the arrangement remain in close proximity to the parent outcrop, and several such outcrops form the focal points for series of concentric circles. Smaller rocks have been utilised to construct the single circles and pathways as well as the low stone mounds which occur in the ground. A regularly spaced series of mounds connects the more isolated south-east portion with the main body of the structures, while others are placed just outside the ceremonial ground to provide rocks when maintenance became necessary.

KOGAN. During August, 1960, further investigations were conducted in the Darling Downs, and at Kogan, 170 miles west of Brisbane, an extensive ceremonial ground was visited. The ground is on the property of Mr. G. Kerr, to the south of Kogan, on the crest of a low, lightly timbered ridge. The situation is similar to that at Cawdor. There are natural clearings, with thin veneers of soil associated with Mesozoic sandstones, limiting vegetation to sparse grasses.

The arrangement is mostly confined to two partially connected clearings where the sandstones reach, but do not outcrop above, the surface. Much of the original structure has been obscured by a large quantity of rock derived from weathering of the exposed sandstones, although several rings and portions of a pathway are still apparent. There is a concentric arrangement present, but in this instance the central



Figure 4. Sinuous mound of rocks, 81 feet in length, at Oakey Creek.

mass is a mound of stones and not an exposed outcrop, as at Cawdor. Two circles and a connecting pathway are isolated within a lightly timbered area, at a distance of about 120 yards north-west of the main clearing.

A single ring measuring seven feet by six feet is present on this property about one half-mile south-south-east of the ceremonial ground; there is no obvious connection between them. Approximately seven miles south of the main Kogan ground, on the crest of a low sandstone ridge on the neighbouring property, is a large oval arrangement. The structure measures fourteen feet by nine feet and is very well preserved.

Oakey. At Oakey Creek, about five miles to the east of the township of Oakey is a stone arrangement of a different character. This is a large mound of rocks, sinuous in form, positioned on an outcrop of basalt. The 81 foot long mound tapers in both plan and elevation, attaining a maximum height of $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet.

In general the rocks associated with this structure are larger in size than those used for the construction of the rings and pathways at either Cawdor or Kogan. Mounds of this size have been described from other parts of Australia and there is much speculation as to their function (Thorpe, 1924, Piddington, 1932). They have been described from south-west Queensland (Dow, 1938), but in most cases the relative dimensions of this mound differ from those previously recorded.

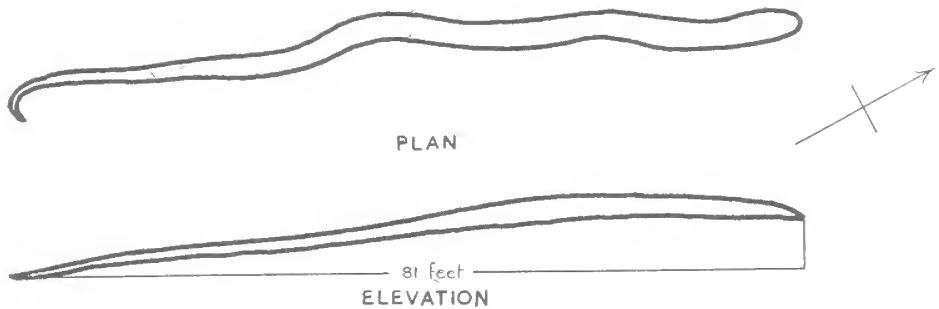


Figure 5. Plan and elevation of sinuous mound of rocks, Oakey Creek.

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